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ABSTRACT

In Belgium, as in many countries, there is an increasing emphasis on school self-management, accompanied by school self-evaluation. A study was conducted to analyze the interpretations of school members involved in a self-evaluation process. The tool was a structured questionnaire of 13 Likert-type scales. As a first test stage, the questionnaire was used in 40 Flemish secondary schools. Three of these schools were of particular interest because they had previously participated in studies of their policy-making capacity. These schools used the questionnaire as a self-evaluation tool. They were asked to analyze the data, including the overall results from the 40 schools, and to provide recommendations with a team of at least 5 members, including the principals, teachers, and other administrators. A brief review is presented for the findings from each school. Results of these studies call for caution in the use of self-evaluation. When the evaluation process is not supported by external help to collect, analyze, and judge the information collected, the school's situation can be misinterpreted. Even the student-oriented school in this study, with an open climate and a high openness of debate, was not able to analyze the data in an acceptable critical way. School-based evaluation without external support is a risky enterprise. (Contains 1 figure and 34 references.) (SLD)

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CONDITIONS AND CAVEATS OF SELF-EVALUATION. THE CASE OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

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Paper presented at
the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association,
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Since the 1980s many countries have a decentralized educational policy. As a result of changes in the governance structures, the individual school is considered as the primary unit of improvement. At the core of this transformation is the belief that the resources and authority to change must reside with those who are closest to the learners. In view of these new ideas the evaluation of the schools' performance in Flemish education has been restructured in 1991. The basis of the Flemish government's evaluation is no longer the individual inspection of teachers but a school-based evaluation.

The guiding principle of the focus on school-based management is that schools must become largely self directing. Moreover, as schools are more and more faced with permanent social and organizational changes, there is a growing need for schools to become self-renewing learning organizations. In this process of organizational learning self-evaluation of schools can be a driving force. Argyris and Schön (1978) defined organizational learning as "a process in which members detect error or anomaly and correct it by restructuring organizational theory of action, embedding the results of their inquiry in organizational maps and images." Self-evaluation can help the schools in the detection and the correction of these errors and anomalies.
The idea of educational evaluation is not new. But the concept of self-evaluation by schools has received new and systematic attention in the light of the decentralization of the educational policy and the growing attention to the concept of the learning organization.

SCHOOL-BASED SELF-EVALUATION: DEFINITION

We define school-based self-evaluation as a process mainly initiated by the school to collect systematic information about the school's functioning, to analyze and judge

this information regarding the quality of the school's education and to make decisions that provide recommendations.

The concept of 'self-evaluation' points towards an internal involvement of the school with the aim to conduct the self-evaluation process as much as possible on its own (Bunt & Van Hees, 1991: 15; Boonen, 1990:3-4). The object of self-evaluation can be specific aspects of the school or the entire school. The evaluation can be focused on the school organization or on the school's instructional process.

The literature suggests that the self-evaluation process has different stages (Nevo, 1995; Voogt, 1989; Boonen, 1990; Van Petegem, 1997):

a. understanding the problem and planning the evaluation:
what are the goals of the evaluation, how will the evaluation be organized, what is the focus of the evaluation;
b. data collection, analysis and interpretation: self-evaluation is an act of collecting systematically information that implies interpretation and judgment. After all, the final goal of self-evaluation is to improve the quality of the school. Judgment requires the presence of social norms. These norms can be very different: internal consistency (schools can judge their functioning by comparing the present situation with the desired situation); comparison with results of the school at different moments in time; comparison with alternative standards set by experts or other relevant groups (Nevo, 1995; Olthof, Emmerik & Satter, 1990);
c. reporting the findings and providing recommendations: the results of the evaluation must be communicated to all relevant stakeholders. On the basis of the observed problems decisions must be made and translated into actions.

The self-evaluation process can use many different research methods, including quantitative and qualitative methods: a strengths and weaknesses analysis, a fully structured systematic questionnaire, interview check-lists, school documents and reports, diaries, discussions, videotapes, etc. Schools can use existing tools or they can develop their own tools (Bosker & Brandsma, 1996: 6-7; Voogt, 1989: 29; Pouwels & Jungbluth, 1991: 17-59; Nevo, 1995; Cremers-van Wees et al., 1996).

At first sight, self-evaluation of a school is a noble and attractive idea. Schools are no longer patronized by educational authorities. They are regarded as intelligent, independent organizations that can decide what is best for themselves. The question is whether schools can meet these high expectations. Is it possible for a school (or any other kind of organization) to reflect on its own practice with the necessary distance and objectivity without the help of external agents? Even when an external, existing tool is used, the question remains whether schools can analyze the data in an unbiased manner. Moreover, the ultimate goal of self-evaluation is the improvement of the organization and not only a diagnose of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Can schools make the right decisions to take actions, based on the results of a self-evaluation process?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Evaluation tool

These questions were the basis of a study we set up in which we analyzed the interpretation of school members involved in a self-evaluation process. The study was part of a larger project aimed at the development of an organizational evaluation tool. The aim of this tool was to map the organizational learning culture in schools. The tool was a structured, systematic questionnaire of 13 Likert-type scales, with 62 items rated on 5 point scales. After a first test stage[1] the questionnaire was used in 40 Flemish secondary schools. All schools were asked to inform their entire staff of the character and purpose of the project in advance.

Case studies

In order to study the interpretation of schools in the self-evaluation process, it was necessary to have a clear view of the organizational context of the schools involved. Human behavior is mediated by the context in which it occurs (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Information about the organizational setting is essential for the explanation of the interpretation processes in schools. Therefore, it was necessary to understand the organizational context of the schools involved in our study.
That is why three of the 40 participating schools in the project were of particular interest. They had previously participated in recent research projects (Devos, 1995; Devos, Van den Broeck & De Cock, 1996) of our department. In these projects the three schools were object of intensive case studies about their policy-making capacity. Case studies offer a rich and in-depth description and analysis of social actions and the construction of social meaning (Yin, 1984; Feagin, et al, 1991). Moreover, in the case studies special attention was paid to the organizational variables that influence the policy-making capacity of schools. Although the concepts of the organizational learning culture and of the policy-making capacity of schools are not identical, they have much in common. The extensive knowledge we acquired through the case studies about the schools was a solid basis for our self-evaluation study.

The three schools were asked in advance if they wanted to use the questionnaire as a self-evaluation tool. They reacted enthusiastically. The staff members of the schools filled out the questionnaires and sent them to the research team. The schools received a description of the evaluation results and a form which explains in detail the conceptual framework the questionnaire was based on. Besides the result of their own school, the schools received the overall result of the 40 participating schools.[2] Because of this overall result, the schools were able to compare their result with the result of the other participating schools.

The schools were asked to analyze the data and to provide recommendations with a team of at least five members, including the principal, teachers and administrative

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[1] For the questionnaire experts in educational administration, organizational behavior and social sciences were consulted. The questionnaire was pre-tested in 10 schools.
[2] The overall result showed the mean and a frequency tabel of all participating schools for every item of the questionnaire and every scale.

staff. The schools were asked to send us a report of their analysis and recommendations.

After we received the interpretation of the data and the recommendations we consulted the school team that analyzed the data. In this consultation we discussed the report of the schools. We contacted the schools for a first time six months and for a second time one year after the consultation and inquired about their actions taken.

Research questions

In our study we addressed three research questions:
1. What are the differences and similarities between the data-analysis of the schools and their action recommendations on the one hand and our interpretation of the data, based on the findings of the case studies of the schools on the other hand?
2. What are the causes for the differences? Do school organizational variables effect the schools' interpretations and recommendations?
3. Did the schools implement their or eventually our recommendations. If not, what were the main reasons according to the schools?

This paper first describes the concept of the organizational learning culture. Second, the concept of the policy-making capacity used in the case-studies of the 3 schools is clarified as well as the research methodology. The case-studies are briefly reported. Finally, the results of the study are presented.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING CULTURE

The questionnaire 'Organizational learning' is based on a conceptual model (Van den Broeck, 1994) that offers a comprehensive framework of organizational learning. The general principle of the model is that the organizational culture is fundamental for the development of the organization's learning mechanisms. The model discerns four levels in the organizational learning culture: an action level, a rational level, a social level and a value level. The four levels are strongly related. They can oppose or reinforce each other. Oppositions between the levels create tensions between the members of the organization and decrease organizational learning. When there are no tensions between the different levels, the organization has an open culture that supports organizational learning. Finally, Van den Broeck discerns three facilitative variables that are closely connected with the nature of linkages between the levels of an organizational learning culture.
In this paragraph, the levels of the organizational learning culture, the linkages between the different levels and the facilitative variables of these linkages are described.

Four levels

In the traditional rational view organizations are supposed to have clear goals and distinct structures. Decisions are made after careful consideration of the necessary facts and figures. Every action is planned carefully in advance. This traditional view is not correct. Almost 30 years ago Weick (1969) already underscored that an

organizational action often is a spontaneous, reactive process that is rationalized afterwards.
Nonaka (1991) discerns explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is systematic and formal. It is the kind of knowledge we are most familiar with. Books, computer programs, teaching are examples of explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is highly personal. It is hard to formalize and to communicate to others. Nonaka states that tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action. It consists of mental models and beliefs that we take for granted. These models shape how we perceive the world around us.
The action level in the conceptual model of the organizational learning culture is the level of spontaneous actions, impulsive reactions, practice and experience, intuition and tacit knowledge.

The rational level is the level of the explicit knowledge. Some of the knowledge about an organization is collected systematically, and presented in an accessible manner. Structures, rules and procedures, manuals, reports and records are the result of the reflexive, rational process of organizational behavior.

The third level is the level of social relations. Studies in organizational learning have stressed the relevance of cooperation and team building in an open climate. Senge (1990: 237) suggested that teams converse in two distinct ways: dialogue and discussion. In dialogue, the participants suspend their assumptions, listen to one another and the result is a free exploration of complex issues. In discussion different arguments are defended and there is a search for the best argument to support decisions. These conversations can only take place when organizational members meet each other on a regular basis and when they trust each other.
The opposite pole of cooperation on the axis of social relations in organizations is organizational politics (Pfeffer, 1981). Organizational politics undermine the coordination of the organization and create disorder (Mintzberg, 1989). Organizational politics are an illegitimate way of influencing the organization for personal or particular interests. It results in conflicts that creates a distance between individuals or organizational units.

The fourth level concerns shared values. Shared values help organizational members to make sense of their own experience (Nonaka, 1991). They create a sense of commonality that permeates throughout the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities (Senge, 1990). It is essential that the values underscore the personal values of people throughout the organization. Shared values do not necessarily emanate from the top. They also can emanate from personal visions of individuals who are not in leadership positions.

Nature of linkages between the levels

It is important to explore whether the four levels of organizational learning culture reinforce or contradict each other. There can be a serious discrepancy between the formal rules and procedures (the rational level) and the way these rules are implemented (action level). Argyris (1990) discerned espoused theory and theory in use. Espoused theory is about what people think they do. Theory in use is what people really do. When values are only formal statements that are not shared between the

organizational members a similar discrepancy appears between the action level and the value level.
In organizations where social relations are dominated by political games, the implementation of decisions, the structure and the values will be distorted. If the structure, the rules and procedures of the organization do not reflect the values, there will be a strong tension between the rational and the value level.
The more tensions between the different levels the less chances for organizational learning.

Facilitative variables

Three facilitative variables are related with the linkages between the different levels of an organizational learning culture: systems thinking, openness of debate and redundancy. These facilitative conditions are regarded as fundamental learning abilities throughout the literature on organizational learning.

The cornerstone of the learning organization is systems thinking. According to Senge (1990) systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. Interrelationships are far more important than things. Organizational members can place their positions in the context of the whole organization. They support each other in the general interest of the organization.

An important learning ability is that organizations can learn from their mistakes. Organizations can only learn when problems and difficulties can be debated without punishment, the leaders are open for discussion and participation is encouraged. The openness of debate is a major indicator of organizational learning.

Finally, a fundamental principle of organizational design is redundancy (Nonaka, 1991; Morgan, 1986) - the overlapping of information, organizational activities and responsibilities. Redundancy is not the same as waste or unnecessary duplication. Redundancy stimulates dialogue and communication. Without it, improvement and innovation are difficult to realize.

In general, organizations with many tensions between the different levels will perform poorly on these facilitative variables. In most of the organizations with very few tensions between the different levels, systems thinking will be strongly developed, problems can be debated openly and redundancy will be present.

The questionnaire 'Organizational learning'

In the questionnaire 'Organizational learning' the four levels (action, rationality, social relations - cooperation and organizational politics - and values) of organizational learning culture, the potential tensions between the different levels and the three facilitative variables of these tensions are treated. Figure 1 shows two items as an example of each scale.
The response to the questionnaire was high: 80 %. In sum, 2.383 forms were returned.
The reliability of the questionnaire was statistically tested. The Cronbach Alpha of 8 scales was between 0.76 and 0.82; 3 scales were between 0.67 and 0.69; 3 scales were between 0.62 and 0.64.

Figure 1. Examples of items of the scales 'Organizational learning'.

Action level
- Everyone who wants, can take initiatives freely
- New ideas are immediately implemented

Rational level
- Everyone knows what is expected of him
- Information is passed on systematically

Social relations level

Cooperation
- Cooperation with colleagues is constructive
- Cooperation with colleagues of other departments is easy

Organizational politics
- In order to influence school policy, it is important to have the right connections
- Colleagues are used by others

Value level
- During school activities regularly is referred to what is important
- The mission is of great importance for staff members

Tension action-rational level
- Formal engagements are broken in practice
- Rules and procedures are often not implemented

Tension action-social relations level
- Individual initiatives create tensions between colleagues
- Too many compromises limit efficient actions

Tension action-value level
- There is a major gap between the school mission and school practice
- Staff members act without knowing the long term goals of the school

Tension model-social relations level
- Rules are the result of those who have the power
- The assignment of tasks creates internal conflicts

Tension rational-value level
- School procedures do not reflect our values
- The structure of the school prevents the implementation of our mission

Tension social relations- value level
- The cooperation among staff members is the opposite of what our mission states
- In view of the social relations it is difficult to find a consensus about the school values

Systems thinking
- Staff members see the school as a whole
- Staff members are committed to school activities

Redundancy
- The work load is very high
- Recently there is less time for the implementation of actions

Openness of debate
- It is difficult to debate problems in the school
- Rules can be disputed bottom up

POLICY-MAKING CAPACITY

In organization theory schools are often classified as professional bureaucracies (Litwak, 1961; Mintzberg, 1979; Hage, 1980). Schools have a dichotomous structure: an instructional part on the one hand focused on the heart of the educational process,

teaching and learning, and an administrative part on the other hand in charge of the coordination, the management and the supportive conditions of the school (Hanson, 1979). The instructional part is based on professional norms and dominated by qualified, autonomous teachers. Educational administrators are active in the administrative part, regulated by bureaucratic principles.

Although schools can generally be classified as professional bureaucracies, their organization and their policy can vary considerably. Studies in Flemish and Dutch education about the organizational differences between schools have resulted in a convergent typology of schools (Marx, 1975; Van der Krogt, 1985; Sleegers, 1991; Buelens & Devos, 1992; Devos, Vandenberghe & Verhoeven, 1989) . The studies also indicate that the organizational characteristics have a strong impact on the policy-making capacity of schools. In all of these studies three types of schools are described:
- the bureaucratic school is characterized by a strong division between the instructional and the administrative domain. The relations between the educational administrators and the teachers are strictly hierarchical. The principal is concerned with the implementation of the administrative rules and procedures issued by the educational authorities. School leadership is reactive and defensive. The teachers act independently and isolated from each other. There are no clear school goals. The school has a low policy-making capacity.
- In the student-centered school principal leadership is aimed toward influencing internal processes that are directly linked to student learning. Principal and teachers consult each other on a regular basis. School goals are developed by the school team. Professional relations between teachers are intense. All staff members show a strong commitment to the school's mission and values. The school has a high policy-making capacity.
- In the curriculum-centered type the school leadership is proactive and not predominantly concerned with official rules and procedures. The principal concentrates on the school administration and the curriculum. The teaching and learning process remains mostly the concern of the individual teachers. Apart from the curriculum and their specific subjects they are not consulted by the principal. The school has a moderate policy-making capacity.

All studies indicate the same characteristics responsible for the different types of schools: the principal's leadership style, cooperation among the teachers, the decentralization of decision-making and the presence of school goals. The school characteristics are interrelated. They differ simultaneously according to the school type.

Educational leadership, school goals, cooperation among staff and decentralization of decision-making define the policy-making capacity of schools. In student-centered schools these characteristics are strongly present. In bureaucratic schools they are very low or even absent.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING CULTURE AND POLICY-MAKING CAPACITY

Organizational learning culture and policy-making capacity are overlapping concepts. In both concepts cooperation among the members of the school is considered very important. Decentralization of decision-making (policy-making capacity) is strongly related to the openness of debate (organizational learning culture). It is impossible to have a strong culture of participation where problems of the school organization cannot be debated in an open climate. Leaders of a school with a high decentralization of decision-making stimulate participation which is essential for the discussion of problems.
Clear goals are an important variable in the concept of policy-making capacity. In a strong organizational learning culture shared values are important. Moreover, there is no difference between the espoused theory and the theory in use. Actions are consequent with formal rational goals and values.

The only variable related to the concept of policy-making capacity that is not treated explicitly in the concept of the organizational learning culture is leadership style. Organizational leadership is an intervening variable that has a major impact on the rational and the value level. It also plays an important role in the way the different levels of the organizational learning culture are linked. It is important to analyze the school leadership in view of our research questions.

One might expect that student-centered schools with a high policy-making capacity will have a high evaluative potential and will have a strong organizational learning culture.

It is interesting to take the school types of policy-making capacity into account when studying the school's interpretation of a self-evaluation tool and the action plans based on this self-evaluation. Bureaucratic schools with a low policy-making capacity will not be able to monitor the self-evaluation process in an appropriate and independent way. The bureaucratic principal is not open to reflection on and critical analysis of the school's functioning. This requires a dynamic and active leadership style. The two other types of schools, the curriculum-centered and the student-centered type have more monitoring capacity for the self-evaluation process.

CASE STUDIES

Methodology

The case studies that provided the necessary information for the observation of the schools' self-evaluation, were based on a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, the analysis of documents and observations. The questionnaire was used to collect general information about the school. Based on the conceptual framework of the policy-making capacity two interview protocols were developed. One for the principal and other members of the school administration. A second one for interviewing the teachers.

Apart from members of the school, pedagogical counselors[3] familiar with the school were interviewed as well.
All interviews were audio taped. The tapes were transcribed and then checked against the tapes.
The analysis of documents comprised manuals of the schools, reports of meetings and year reports.
In each school two meetings of teachers and two meetings of school administrators were observed. Of each meeting a report was made.

Transcriptions of the interviews were coded according to procedures proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984). First, a within-site analysis was carried out based on the interviews, the documents and the observations. In the second stage, a cross-site analysis was made.

In this paragraph a brief review is presented for every school of the findings of the case studies. Second, the most important results of the questionnaire 'Organizational learning' are described, followed by the analysis and recommendations of the school teams based on this result. Finally, the situation of the school is indicated, a year after the self-evaluation was carried out.

School A

General characteristics of the school organization

School A is a catholic, vocational 12-18 school in an industrialized area of Flanders, near a harbor. There are 750 students and 85 staff members. Although the school is co-educational, its population is almost entirely male, students as well as staff. The curriculum has a technical-industrialized profile. Relations with the local industry are intense.
The school was founded only 20 years ago and has grown considerably since.
With respect to its policy-making capacity the school can be labeled as a curriculum-centered type.

Leadership style
The first principal, who still is the present head of the school, has played a major part in the school's expansion. He is a dynamic, entrepreneurial school leader. His major concern is the expansion of the school, the infrastructure and the financial policy and the strong relations with the local industry of the harbor. According to him the school's education and curriculum must be adapted to the needs of the industry as much as possible.
The principal has a very dominant personality. Although he was very cooperative for the case study, it was very hard to make him listen to the questions asked during the interviews. It was as if hé had decided what the study should be about.

[3] The counselors are external change facilitators paid by the Flemish government to support the schools in their educational activity.

School goals

The school goals are a reflection of the principal's leadership. The school wants to be a pioneer in new developments. School activities are aimed at anticipating innovations, especially in the technical courses where the needs of the local industry are the major directive.

The school has strong marketing goals. The concern for the maintenance or growth of the school population is a major concern of the principal. Following the recruitment objectives of the principal, almost every staff member must do a number of home visits, to recruit new students.

Decentralization of decision-making

Apart from the official advisory councils there are no consultative bodies between the staff and the school leader. The official councils do not function properly. They only exist in a formal way. The staff is never really consulted about the school policy. The only important council in the school is a board with representatives of the local industry and the school administration

The absence of participation is a consequence of the principal's leadership style. He directs the school in a authoritarian way and sets objectives for the staff without discussion. Disagreement with the principal very often results in major conflicts.

Cooperation

There is a moderate intradepartmental cooperation. In most departments technical teachers consult one another about the courses, the evaluation of students and in-service training. The teachers of general subjects show almost no cooperation at all. They operate isolated from one another.

Moreover, there is a strong interdepartmental rivalry. This rivalry is due in a major part to the principal's recruitment policy. Departments are played off against one another. Departments compete for every student they can enroll.

Results of the questionnaire 'Organizational learning'

School A had an overall extremely low profile. Of all participating schools, school A had one of the lowest scores on the action (2.83)[4], rational (3.02), coalition (3.28) and value level (3.33). The school had one of the highest scores on all of the tension scales with the highest score on 'tension between the rational-social relations level' (3.59), 'tension between the social relations-value level' (3.40) as well as on the scale organizational politics (3.50). The school had a low score on the scale redundancy (2.29), the lowest score on the scale openness of debate (2.77), the second lowest on systems thinking (2.87).

In view of the case study we expected the school to have a bad result on the questionnaire 'Organizational learning'. The interdepartmental competition, the principal's authoritarian style and the absence of any kind of shared decision-making could hardly result in a strong organizational learning culture. But the very low result on the scale action level and value level was a surprise. The school has very clear school goals. This could result in a high score on the value level. But the fact that

[4] This is the mean of all staff members of the school on the 5 point scale.

these goals are the result of one person, formulated without the participation of the staff, probably has a negative effect on the value level score.
Although the school is extremely dynamic and very entrepreneurial, the school has one of the lowest scores on the action level. It seems that the negative school climate has a general negative effect on the staff's perception of the school.

The result on the rational level is also one of the lowest of the reference group. The school leader makes several reports, plans activities and collects information systematically, but a majority of the staff is not informed of these documents and databases. The school has a very poor internal communication.

Analysis of the data and recommendations provided by the school

The report of the school's analysis and judgment of the data was thorough and accurate. The right causes for the bad result on the different scale were indicated. Based on our case study we fully agreed with the analysis made by the school.
The principal was very disappointed with the result of the questionnaire. At the end of the report he wrote that in all he thought he had done a good job in building the school up from scratch to its present state: a dynamic, technical school with 750 students and a high reputation in the local area. He claimed he had hired over a 100 members of the staff on the same basis: teachers with authority, with strong instructional skills, hard working and creative. According to the principal this hiring policy had resulted in a dynamic but very critical staff that had answered the questionnaire very critically. But he preferred 100 of those teachers to 100 teachers who remain silent.

The school team provided the following recommendations:
- As the communication of the school policy was very poor, the principal should be more present at meetings of the staff to clarify policy decisions.
- For every course a teacher should be appointed as a representative of his colleagues to discuss certain problems with the principal.
- Part of the bad communication was due to the poor quality of the school's meetings: too much whining and too little attention for solutions of problems. A project team should be responsible for setting up norms, rules and standards for meetings. An inventory should be made up. All staff members should receive a report of the meeting rules and the meeting skills.
- The existing advisory council should be revalued in order to discuss problems more openly and to increase shared decision-making.

In the follow-up meeting we had with the school team that analyzed the data, the principal started the meeting by saying that the results of the questionnaire were very bad. The questionnaire illustrated he had failed in communicating with his staff, in listening to his staff and in deciding on major issues without consulting the teachers. So he stated he would remain silent during the meeting and listen to the others. This silence lasted for ten minutes. Then gradually he intervened and after half an hour he dominated the meeting completely. At a certain point, he said that in view of the lack of shared decision-making in the school, he would organize a staff meeting to discuss the financial details of the school's building plans. He would send a full report to all personnel of the school in advance. He expected them to be very participating in that

meeting, but - and then he became very angry - he warned them if they would not have read the report thoroughly. "If they want participation, they must earn it." he claimed.

The research team suggested that most of the recommendations were meaningful, but that the final message for the school leader was to try to appreciate other opinions than his own, to listen to his staff, to decrease the pressure on the staff and to eliminate the rivalry between the departments. We also suggested that the idea of the financial meeting was not such a good idea because teachers are most of all concerned with their own activities, not the financial problems of the school. Finally, it was suggested that meeting skills can be learned more efficient in an in-service training than with a report of an inventory.

The team, and the principal in particular, agreed with this suggestions.

In fact, the research team was convinced of the fact that in the school's interest it was better if the principal would leave the communication and the relations with the staff to the vice-principal. However, the research team was in no position to suggest this to the school administrators. After all, the school board was not involved in the school-based evaluation. The board had not given any assignment to the research team for that matter. The process was a voluntary action of the school administration.

After the meeting, the pedagogical counselor who participated in the case study, was informed of our meeting with the school team. He agreed fully with the result. He acknowledged our pessimism about the chances for fundamental change in the school since a major part of the school's problems is due to the personality of the school leader. It is not easy to change one's personality. The principal's behavior as to the staff meeting about the school's construction plans was a first indication.

The school one year later

A year after our meeting, most of the recommendations as discussed with the research team were realized formally. However, the pedagogical counselor, who was interviewed in the initial case study, informed us that this had not resulted in fundamental changes. The principal had not changed his authoritarian style at all. Communication in the advisory councils was still strictly top down. The rivalry between the departments had not decreased. The pedagogical counselor could not imagine the principal being open to other opinions than his own. Finally, the principal's preoccupation with the school's financial management had still increased.

School B

General characteristics of the school organization

School B is a technical co-educational 12-18 school of the local provincial authority. It is located between an industrialized and a rural area. The school was founded 70 years ago. It has evolved from an agricultural school to a technical industrial school with an important agricultural department.

The school has grown considerably since the appointment of the current principal in 1986 from 500 to 780 students with 110 staff members. The last two years the student population has stabilized.
The school is a mix of a curriculum-centered and a student-centered organization.

Leadership style
The principal is an educational leader with a clear and explicit view on how the school has to be managed. He is mainly directed at the primary, educational process of the school and its immediate facilitative conditions. The principal indicates that although a certain responsiveness to the needs of the business community is essential, the school cannot be the slave of the demands of local companies, even if this would benefit the school financially. The school is an independent, educational organization with its own goals.
The school's policy is clearly dominated by the principal. He tries to structure and monitor all school activities. Rules and procedures must be respected. If teachers want to take new initiatives they must consult the principal in advance.

School goals
The school's main concern is to provide a balance between a modern, technical education and a general education. Apart from instructional and educational skills teachers must have the necessary social skills to coach the students.
Quality control is a major priority of the school, which results in clear task assignments, with explicit rules and procedures.

Decentralization of decision-making
Apart from the official advisory councils, the principal has set up a steering committee for the quality control in the school. According to the principal this committee is the school's major decision-making body. Its representatives are elected every two year by the entire staff. The steering committee has evolved into a general advisory council of the school where the staff can discuss their problems and complaints about the school. The principal would like to set up another committee more focused on the school's quality control.
Many of the principal's decisions are made without any staff consultation. According to the principal this is due to the large number of staff members. Teachers have a different view in this matter: they think that the principal has a strong personality who demands the teachers to follow his instructions. Some of the (mainly elderly) teachers object to the clear rules, objectives and explicit demands of the principal. This objection is not always a result of a wish for more participation in the school policy. Many of them just want to be left alone.

Cooperation
There is a structural, strong cooperation among teachers of the same courses. They are organized in content oriented task forces. There is no cooperation at all between technical teachers and teachers of general subjects. Moreover, there is a certain rivalry between the agricultural and the mechanical department of the school. The principal is definitely not happy with this rivalry, but he has difficulty in coping with this situation.

Results of the questionnaire 'Organizational learning'

The overall result of school B is rather bad. On the one hand, 70 to 90 % of the reference group has a higher score as to the action level (3.06), the rational level (3.23), the cooperation scale (3.20) and the value level (3.31). On the other hand, 70 to 90 % of the reference group has a lower score on the tension scales and on the scale organizational politics (3.09). The same goes for the three facilitative variables systems thinking (2.99), openness of debate (3.26) and redundancy (2.12).

The case study of school B showed a centralized decision-making, tensions between the departments and tensions between the clear objectives and demands of the principal and the teachers. So a rather bad result of the questionnaire could be expected. The school leader's dominance and demanding style create a tense climate. This does not leave much room for debate and discussion.

Once again, although the school is very dynamic, the score on the action level is rather low. This might be due to the fact that teachers always must ask for permission before they can take new initiatives.
Surprisingly, the score on the rational level is below the average of the reference group. Yet, the school has very clear rules, procedures, reports and objectives. The problem seems to be that despite the presence of explicit regulations the staff is not familiar with them. The communication about these regulations is not transparent. The principal's communicating style is formal and top down. Most of his announcements are communicated in writing.

Analysis of the data and recommendations provided by the school

The elaborated analysis of the school - reported by the principal - showed that the school team (in fact the principal) had great difficulty in coming to the right conclusions. Although the interpretation of the results was fairly accurate, the suggestions for future action did not fit in with the analysis.
Overall, the report suggested that the school policy was dominated by the principal. Teachers could not take actions without the principal's approval. The school had many rules, procedures, job descriptions and objectives. They were developed by the principal after complaints by the staff of a lack of clarity of the rules.
The openness of debate was signaled as a problem. According to the report this was due to the fact that the school's population had increased during the last ten years. School administrators did not have enough time to discuss problems with the staff. Also, a better assignment of the tasks between the advisory councils should create more opportunities for dialogue and discussion.
The report stated that the school's values were rather well known, but the staff was not committed to these values. A few weeks before the report was written, the principal had changed a paragraph in the mission of the school. He had asked the staff for a reaction in writing. There was only one reaction.

A selection of the recommendations that were suggested by the school is presented:
- the major action for the principal was to set up systematically appraisal interviews with all personnel members. In these appraisals attention should be paid to the results

of each staff member and the climate in the school. The job descriptions should be the basis of the interviews.
- Rules and procedures would be investigated and details limiting the employees' scope would be removed as much as possible.
- Rules and procedures would be adjusted in the advisory councils according to the changing school context.
- The staff would be informed in advance of the purpose of new initiatives and their relation with the mission of the school.
- Decisions would be explained more clearly. If certain decisions would appear to be wrong, the principal would admit this and he would adjust the decision.
- Staff members would be trained in meeting skills.
- The content oriented task forces would receive new and more explicit assignments.

The analysis suggested that the communication in the school was too unilateral top down, with too many rules and objectives made up by the principal without any consultation of the staff members. Most of the recommendations were not directed at a fundamental change of the present situation.

The principal confirmed this impression in the follow-up meeting we had with the school team. The principal claimed that he had learned a lot of the school's evaluation. His first priority was to set up appraisal interviews, based on the present job descriptions. In these interviews he would clearly communicate the objectives of each staff member.
During the meeting we tried to convince the principal that the school's most important needs were not new systems, rules and procedures set up by the school administration. The school was in need of a more informal way of communication, with a more relaxed leadership and the possibility of the staff to discuss openly their problems without being stigmatized as eternal soreheads.
Much to his surprise, we suggested the principal to interact with his staff members in a much more informal manner, without giving directions or discussing their job description. We thought the major assignment of the principal was to listen to his colleagues and to try to see the problems of teachers from their point of view.
We suggested the principal to dine along with his staff (which he never did) and to meet his colleagues after school hours at social, informal occasions.
The principal stated that the most fundamental change he faced in his school was his personal leadership style. He claimed that, although he could not change his character, he would try to change his way of interacting with the staff.

The school one year later

The principal really tried to implement the recommendations. In the beginning, teachers distrusted the presence of the principal at informal occasions. The change in style surprised them and they didn't really know what to think of his behavior. However, a year after the meeting between the research team and the school, teachers told us that the principal was more open to their views. Although his leadership style had not radically changed - he still loved formal procedures and explicit rules - they had noticed he tried to communicate more openly. The principal told us that the first steps in trying to change his way of interacting had been hard. He said that everyone felt uneasy about his new way of interacting. However, he acknowledged that the staff

gradually had begun to appreciate his more informal style. He was rather satisfied with the result. He "confessed" he could not have helped making several changes in the school's rules and procedures. He had tried to diminish the rivalry between the departments in his school, but he didn't have the impression that the situation had improved.

School C

General characteristics of the school organization

School C is a technical co-educational 12-18 school of a large Flemish city. The school is the result of a merger in 1991 between two schools. In the meantime the student population has increased from 592 to 705 with 105 staff members. 27 % of the students are of Turkish or Moroccan origin. The school is a student-centered type.

Leadership style
The principal is a dynamic school leader with a major interest in people. She is deeply concerned with the well-being of the students and staff members of her school. She is very impulsive and innovative. She sets up task forces to dices school activities and to develop the school policy. Although many of the school projects are initiated by the principal, she tries to stimulate staff members to take initiatives as well.
She has a direct and informal way of communicating. Her office is an open room between the school secretariat and the teachers' room. Throughout the day, everybody walks in an out of her office.
Because of her impulsive character the principal often initiates new projects without finishing other existing activities.

School goals
The fundamental mission of the school is the coaching of students, adapted to their individual situation. The traditional transfer of knowledge is only a secondary goal of the school. The school tries to develop the students' individual attitudes, such as self respect and self confidence, and social skills in order to raise the students as responsible citizens in our society.

Decentralization of decision-making
School C is a democratic school, where most of the staff is involved in the development of the school policy. The school has several advisory councils and task forces. Aside from the official councils, the school has a student council and a steering committee of 14 teachers, elected by their colleagues. The principal, who attends the meetings of this committee has no voting right. The steering committee deals with the problems, questions and advice of staff members and the student council. The committee organizes the division of tasks in the school.
18 task forces are active. Most of the staff members participate in several of these task forces. Some of them are responsible for fundamental educational subjects (e.g. instructional changes, learning skills). Others deal with administrative tasks (e.g. infrastructure, school time tables).

Cooperation

Teachers strongly respect and appreciate one another. For all of them, an open attitude towards the students and towards each other is very important. There is a strong informal cooperation among teachers. Teachers sometimes make arrangements about the criteria the evaluation of students is based on. Some of them have even visited one another in the classroom. Still, this cooperation is not comprehensive. It is not structured. Staff members do not consult one another systematically. Even the task forces, who have clear goals and responsibilities, show a lack of structure and planning. Many arrangements are settled during coffee breaks. Often there is no report of the meetings.

Results of the questionnaire 'Organizational learning'

School C scored very high on the action level (3.92 - the highest score), cooperation (4.03), the value level (3.87), systems thinking (3.77) and openness of debate (4.11). The scores on organizational politics (2.33) and on most of the tension scales between the different levels of the organizational learning culture, were very low. According to the questionnaire there is not much redundancy in the school (2.23).

This result confirms the findings in the case study of school C. Staff members are stimulated and motivated to take initiatives; the school brims over with energy. So, it was no surprise that the school has the highest score of the reference group on the action level. Therefore, it is logical that redundancy in the school is very low.
As teachers respect one another strongly and they cooperate intensively, the school had a high score on cooperation and a low score on organizational politics.
The staff members share a common concern as far as the values are concerned. Therefore, the score on the value level was high. The open climate and the involvement of all staff members in the development of the school policy resulted in a high score on systems thinking and on the openness of debate.

Only one result of the questionnaire was unexpected: the score on the rational level (3.87) was more than the average of the reference group. In fact, only 25 % of the population had a better result on this scale. In the case study several respondents stressed that the school lacked planning and structure. They claimed that information was not communicated adequately. Often, new projects were set up without evaluating earlier projects. These were the main reasons why too many activities fizzled out.

Analysis of the data and recommendations provided by the school

The school team made a clear analysis of the questionnaire data. The team stated that the result gave a fairly good picture of the school's culture. The team members had no trouble in explaining the rather high score on the rational level. A few months before the questionnaire was filled out, the school had invested much energy in a better planning and structuring of the school activities. This was in part a consequence of the audit carried out by an official inspection team, a procedure each school is faced with on a regular basis. The school now had a comprehensive school plan for every year and task forces were set up for every subject in order to structure the cooperation between the teachers.

The team acknowledged that the work load in the school is very high. Most of the staff members are so involved in the school's activities that there is not enough time left for evaluation and coordination of activities. Due to this lack of coordination it regularly happens that several teachers are working on identical projects without being informed of each other.

In the follow-up meeting with the school team we asked whether the comprehensive school plan had resulted in a more structured school activity. The answer was rather astonishing: yes, many staff members had been involved in the development of the school plan and this had resulted in an intense discussion about the main values of the school. The discussion of the school's values was regarded as an important process for the whole school team. But once the school plan was finished and handed out to all staff members no one had ever referred to the plan again.
The task forces for every subject were set up, but it was difficult to organize meetings on a regular basis since many of the teachers were involved in other school activities as well.

The research team explained to the school team that a lot of energy was lost because of the lack of structure, follow-up, coordination and evaluation of the different projects. We explained that the rather high score on the rational level was in a way misleading. It does not suffice to draw up a plan if the plan is not used as a guide for implementation activities and evaluation. What is the use of task forces if they do not meet on a regular basis? We also suggested that it can be more rewarding to set up one or two projects that can be monitored thoroughly instead of starting a large amount of projects that fizzle out because of the lack of attention paid to the implementation and the evaluation of the projects.

The school team appreciated our comments. The members recognized that the school needed a more structured approach. They said they would try to implement this approach more thoroughly.

The school one year later

One year later, the school had set up many new activities. The school had even developed a new information system in order to monitor the input, throughput and output flows of students. But the school team had not found the time to use the system properly for the development of the school's policy. Several staff members as well as the principal stated that it seemed impossible to implement a more structured approach. They claimed that the basic foundation of the school's culture was the informal, rather chaotic way of communicating and organizing. This way of doing supported the open climate and the high respect of colleagues for each other. This culture produced a warm, human climate where people felt at home. The staff members stated that the structuring of the school activities formed a major threat to this culture. They did not want to endanger the main values of the school. So they chose to try to live with the disadvantages of their school culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Differences between the data-analysis of the schools and our analysis

Our first research question regarded the similarities and differences between the data-analysis of the schools and their recommendations on the one hand and our analysis based on the case studies of the schools on the other hand. The three school teams had no difficulty in analyzing the statistical description of the questionnaire's data. However, in two schools the interpretation of the data differed from our analysis. In school B the result of the questionnaire showed a one-sided top-down policy, with too many rules and procedures set up by the principal without any kind of consultation of the staff. The school team, in which the principal played a central role, diagnosed a problem of communication between the principal and the school staff. This was our diagnosis as well. According to our analysis, the obvious causes of this communication problem were the dominating personality of the principal, the lack of an open climate that allowed dialogue and discussion and the lack of personal interaction between the principal and his staff. The causes that the school team found were very different: the fact that the school had many rules and procedures were the result of earlier complaints of the staff about the lack of clarity of the rules. The low openness of debate was due to bad task assignments between the advisory councils and the fact that the principal did not thoroughly informed the staff about school policy decisions.
Consequently, the recommendations of the school team based on this interpretation were partly in opposite of our suggestions for further action. The school team wanted to set up a system of appraisal interviews based on the job descriptions of the staff members. We suggested a reduction of formal systems and procedures and a listening attitude of the principal.

In school C, the positive result of the rational level was unexpected. When we questioned the school team about this positive result, it seemed that the school had set up plans and structures recently. The school team was satisfied with the result. The members did not distrust this fact. It was only after we questioned the team about the implementation of the plans and structures that the team realized that the plans and structures were superfluous. They did not really change the school activities.

Only in school A the data-analysis of the school team corresponded with our analysis. Still, the principal had difficulty in accepting the consequences of the analysis. According to him, a part of the bad result of the school was due to the fact that the staff members were very critical individuals. They had filled out the questionnaire with the same attitude.

Causes for the different analysis

It is clear that the perception of the school teams in the data-analysis was biased by the organizational context in which they operated. In school B the principal dominated the analysis as much as he dominated the school policy in general. The team members discussed the result of the analysis without ever questioning the principal's leadership style. Eventually, the principal's preference for a centralized formal management by objectives was responsible for his remarkable interpretation of the data-analysis.

Although he rationally understood that the openness of debate was low, he was not able to draw the right conclusions for him personally. His team members did not help him either. Because of his dominating leadership style it was almost impossible for the staff members to confront the principal with the flaws of his leadership style. It was only after we presented our analysis the principal accepted the consequences of the school evaluation for his leadership behavior. At that time, he realized that the fundamental change to reduce the tensions between the different levels of the organizational learning culture, was not an increase of plans, procedures or systems. He understood that he was concerned too much with rational objectives. The school needed a more personal and informal leadership style in order to discuss problems in a more open way. This openness could be the basis of an increased commitment of the staff in the school policy. So, tensions between the action and the rational level and between the action and the value level could be reduced.

The analysis of school A was similar to the analysis of the research team. In contrast to his colleague of school B, the principal of school A made a clear diagnose of the questionnaire's result together with his team. However, in the discussion with the research team about the school's analysis and recommendations, it became clear that the principal was not prepared to or was not able to change his personal behavior. Although school A made a more objective diagnose of the school's organizational learning culture than school B, the principal of school B was more prepared to change personally. So, the readiness to change does not necessarily coincide with the personal discovery of the school's weaknesses.
The main difference between the two schools is the difference in leadership style. In school A (a clear example of a curriculum-centered type of school), the principal is concentrated on the infrastructural and financial policy, the expansion of the school and the curriculum. He has a major interest in external relations with the local environment. He is a true school administrator.
The principal of school B (a mixture of a curriculum-centered and a student-centered school) is an educational leader directed at the primary, educational process of the school. He has a more critical attitude than his colleague towards the needs of the local business community. Although he wants to be in control of the school policy as much as the principal of school A, he is capable of a critical reflection about the school policy and the school's goals. This fundamental difference between the two personalities can explain why the principal of school B was more prepared to change his personal behavior.

School C, a very dynamic school, with strong shared values, shared decision-making and many opportunities for debate, received an overall positive result. According to our case study, one of the weakest elements in the school was the lack of a structured approach. This was not revealed in the questionnaire, although the questionnaire probed for the presence of this approach with the items of the rational level scale and the scale regarding the tension between the action and the rational level. Staff members acknowledged the presence of school plans and structures. The fact that the plans and structures were often not really implemented did not lower the school's result on this scale.
Although the result of a questionnaire is presented in numbers, it can hardly be regarded as an objective fact. The scores on the different items still remain the result of an interpersonal perception. Scholars (Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Gergen, 1992)

have stressed that a disadvantage of strong, homogeneous organizational cultures is the lack of diversity of perceptions. This endangers a critical attitude towards current organizational practices and values. It prevents the learning process in these organizations. An organizational learning culture is a very complex concept. On the one hand, the literature states that shared values are fundamental for organizational learning (Senge, 1990). They create a personal commitment and a sense of identity with the organization and its vision (Nonaka, 1991). On the other hand, learning organizations question their mental models (Senge, 1990). Our internal pictures of how the world works, must be surfaced, tested and improved. School C has strong, shared values and problems can be debated freely. Still, the school members did not realize that their structural approach was superfluous and did not have an impact on the school activities. When the members became aware of this fact, they did not want to try to implement this structural approach more thoroughly because they were afraid this would endanger the school's organizational culture. Indeed, it is possible that the strong implementation of plans, rules, procedures and structures would destroy in part the human values (concern for the well-being of students and staff) that are so typical for this school. The case of school C shows that the consequences of changes in a school organization in order to enhance the organizational learning culture must be considered carefully. Hastily decisions can do more harm than good.

Implementations of the recommendations

A year after the data-analysis, only in one school some changes were implemented. The principal in school B tried to interact with his staff on a more informal basis. The teachers appreciated this change although they claimed that the behavior of the principal had not changed radically.
In school A the actions set up after the evaluation did not result in real changes. The actions had no effect since the principal did not change his dominating, aggressive leadership style.
The team of school C stated that the implementation of a more structured approach of the school activities threatened the existing school culture. Eventually, the school was not motivated to reform school practices.

Changes in school organizations are a complex and difficult enterprise. Our study confirms the central role of the school leader in this process. He or she has a major impact on the organizational culture. This culture is hard to manage. The evaluation of the three schools in our study suggested the need of fundamental changes in the leadership style and even the "personality" of the principal, or in the school's values emanated in the practices, the internal cooperation and the perception of the school members.
As far as changes are possible (school A and B) or necessary (school C), they can not be implemented without external support. None of the three schools would have been able to interpret the data-analysis unbiased, to draw the right conclusions and to implement the recommendations on their own. Due to the advice of the research team, the principal in school B tried to change his personal leadership style in order to create a more open climate to discuss the problems of the staff.
Despite of the advice in school A, nothing really changed because the principal was not able or was not prepared to change his leadership style. Major changes here can

only come from a change in the school leadership. However, this change is beyond the reach of the research team involved in the evaluation process.
In school C, the school was not able to interpret the data-analysis in an acceptable critical way. The team was satisfied with the positive result of the rational level scale, although this result was not an accurate description of the school's situation.

However, the school-based evaluation of school C shows that both the school and the external agent can learn from each other in the evaluation process. Nevo (1995) argued that the distinction between the evaluator and the client must be lessened in order to create a basis for a dialogue between both parties. Evaluators should refrain from overall assessments, determining what is best for the school. Nevo (1995: 185) stated that they "should describe the evaluation object and judge its various aspects, to help their audiences understand the nature of the object and its qualities, so that they can make their choices according to their needs, and to circumstances in which such choices are being made." That is exactly what happened in the evaluation process of school C. The research team diagnosed that the school had a poor structural approach that hardly affected the school activities. The school team chose not to try and change this structural approach with more plans, structures and procedures because this could jeopardize the school's core values. The research team acknowledged this danger and respected the school's viewpoint in this matter.
The case of school C shows that a permanent dialogue between the external agent and the school, based on a mutual respect, is essential throughout the whole evaluation process.

Final discussion

The findings of our study are related in the first place to the use of the questionnaire 'Organizational learning' in a self-evaluation process by secondary schools. Still, the results of our study caution for school-based self-evaluations in general, in which schools use an existing evaluation tool without external support to collect, analyze and judge systematically information about the school's functioning. This unsupported process can lead to misinterpretations of the school's situation. In fact, it can result in actions opposite to the necessary ones.

We already stressed that we believe that bureaucratic schools with a low policy-making capacity will not be able to monitor the self-evaluation process in an appropriate and independent way. Our study shows that the dynamic leadership of other schools is no guarantee for a successful result either. Even the student-oriented school in our study, with an open climate and a high openness of debate, was not able to analyze the data in an acceptable critical way.

Another fundamental question raises as to the point of stimulating schools to evaluate their organization and their leadership, when there is no guarantee that potential changes will be considered meticulously. It is very difficult to change the personality of people or the organizational culture of schools. The literature often states that the process of organizational change is more important than the result of the change. Although we do not doubt there is a certain truth in this statement, we believe that statement is a slogan that is often used to justify frivolous initiatives in schools. If the change process is more important than the result, the process definitely must be

monitored carefully and the schools must be coached according to their organizational profile. Consequently, a school-based self-evaluation without external support is a very risky enterprise.

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